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2 April 1954

MEMORANDUM FOR THE DIRECTOR OF CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE

SUBJECT: The Post-election Political Outlook in Pakistan

1. The smashing defeat of Pakistan's Moslem League in the East Bengal provincial elections has broken the League's monopoly of power, a major factor in the past stability of Pakistan. The United Front victory virtually eliminated the League from participation in the government of a province containing more than half of Pakistan's population, and the opposition is now challenging the League's control over the central government. As a result, the conclusions in NIE-79, "Probable Developments in South Asia" (June 1953), that the present regime is likely to remain in power for some years without prospect of opposition are no longer valid.\*

2. The reasons for the upset appear to involve domestic rather than foreign affairs. It was probably due to a combination of: (a) East Bengal resentment of its step-child status within Pakistan — it suffers political, economic, and linguistic discrimination; (b) dissatisfaction with East Bengal's poor economic conditions, which the relatively strong left-wing elements of the coalition pledged to remedy; (c) the ineptitude and unpopularity of the Moslem League provincial administration; and (d) the effective grassroots campaign conducted on behalf of the United Front, particularly by student groups.

3. The United Front is a loosely organized coalition, united mainly in its determination to kick out the Moslem League. It centers around a coterie of dissident former League politicians making up the Awami Moslem League led by H. S. Suhrawardy and M. A. Bhashani. The other important component is Fazlul Haq's Peasants and Workers Party. There has been some Communist infiltration of the Awami group, and several United Front supported winners in the elections have open or covert Communist ties.

\* A new National Intelligence Estimate on Pakistan is scheduled under the Estimative Program for the first quarter of 1955, but the Board intends to recommend earlier action. An important aspect of the Pakistani problem will also be dealt with in NIE 30-54, "Middle East Defense", scheduled for production in the present quarter.

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The Front catered to popular feeling with demands for the use of Bengali as a second national language, a more "truly Islamic" national constitution, greater provincial autonomy, and the nationalization of foreign economic interests.

4. Neither US military aid nor the Turkish-Pakistani pact figured as important issues in the campaign, although the Moslem League claimed credit for these as diplomatic successes and one powerful United Front figure attacked the League's pro-US policy. Since the elections, however, leaders of the Front have been more outspoken against Pakistan's cooperation with the West.

5. The situation is still highly unsettled and the United Front's surprise victory creates a potential threat to the stability and cohesion of Pakistan:

- a. The Front may harass the central government by demonstrations and other mass pressure tactics and is likely to be joined in its efforts by additional League members disgruntled with the regime. It will probably attempt to replace with United Front men at least some of the forty-four East Bengal members of the seventy-nine seat central assembly, and may even try for dissolution of the entire assembly and reorganization of the cabinet. Although the government is not legally required to alter the assembly or change the cabinet, it may yield partially to this pressure.
- b. The United Front, which lacks discipline and experience, may fail to meet its responsibilities in running the East Bengal provincial government, in which case the central government might intervene. With "Governor's Rule" from Karachi, this could lead to violence and would probably strengthen latent separatist tendencies in the province.
- c. United Front leader Suhrawardy is ambitious to succeed Mohammed Ali as Prime Minister and intends to campaign in West Pakistan in preparation for the national elections promised for next year. The League probably faces a hard fight in these elections in East Bengal and possibly even in West Pakistan.

6. However, the ability of the United Front to follow up its recent victory is still uncertain. The coalition had a hard enough

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time holding together during the elections and may have difficulty in functioning effectively as a united national opposition party. It may also have its hands full organizing the provincial government in East Bengal. Finally, the Muslim League will probably seek to revitalize its organization and to increase its popular appeal in East Bengal by adopting as its own some of the causes which served the opposition so well, such as making Bengali a second official language. Thus the League may be able to improve its position prior to the national elections.

7. Until the elections occur, we believe that the League (although not necessarily Hoshur Ali's present cabinet) has a better than even chance of retaining its hold on the central government and forestalling any serious threat to the cohesion of Pakistan. It is likely to meet opposition threats by some concessions to the United Front, but will probably be prepared, if necessary, to use its control of the security forces to maintain its hold on power.

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National Estimates

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